

Right Choices

Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

Someone has made a list of "**Politically Correct Ways of Indicating Stupidity**". Perhaps you have heard some of these. They're quite creative. Speaking of someone who has done something really dumb, we might say:

He's a few clowns short of a circus . . .

A few fries short of a Happy Meal . . .

A few peas short of a casserole . . .

He doesn't have all his corn flakes in one box . . .

The wheel's spinning, but the hamster's dead . . .

His antenna doesn't pick up all the channels . . .

His belt doesn't go through all the loops . . .

He is several cards short of a full deck . . .

Missing a few buttons on his remote control . . .

The lights are on, but nobody's home . . .

He's not just a few beers short of a six pack; he's lost the plastic thingy . . .

Have you ever noticed that sometimes people make really dumb decisions things? Why do they do that? Jesus told a parable:

"God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. That night, while his hired men were asleep, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up, too.

"The farmhands came to the farmer and said, 'Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn't it? Where did these thistles come from?'

"He answered, 'Some enemy did this.'

"The farmhands asked, 'Should we weed out the thistles?'

"He said, 'No, if you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I'll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.'" [Matthew 13: 24-30 The [Message](#) Eugene Peterson]

The act of sowing weeds in another man's field as a form of revenge was so common in Jesus' day that there were laws prohibiting it. Wheat and tares look identical until they ripen, at which point the wheat head looks very different from that of the weed.

The implication of the parable is clear: There are good and bad folks in the world. The good folks go along with God; the bad folks go along with the devil. One day there will be a judgment when the good folks will be separated from the bad.

But there is an issue that this parable does not address.

I. GOOD FOLKS SOMETIMES DO STUPID THINGS.

Our experience tells us that life is not as simple as the parable indicates. There are not people in white hats who always do good things and folks in black hats who always do bad things. The folks in white hats sometimes make dreadfully bad choices.

Why otherwise good people allow themselves to get trapped in self-destructive patterns of behavior is beyond our understanding. And where does such behavior come from? Can we get off the hook by saying, as Ms Geraldine said, "**The debil made me do it?**" Is it genetic? Are there people who are just born bad?

An instructor in a dog training workshop in Salt Lake City noted that a dog's disposition can be tested by the owner. If the owner will fall down and pretend to be hurt, a dog with a bad temper will tend to bite him. But a good dog will show concern and may lick the fallen owner's face.

Susan Matice attended the class and then decided to test her two dogs. While eating pizza in her living room, she stood up, clutched her heart, screamed and fell to the floor. Her two dogs looked at her, looked at each other, and then raced to the coffee table for her pizza.

What causes some good people to lose control of their lives? Even more important, how can we help these people and even help ourselves when we are drawn toward similar self-destructive patterns?

Journalist Bob Garfield specializes in reporting on the quirky and unique aspects of human nature. When Garfield traveled through Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1992, he thought that he'd hit the mother lode of quiriness. He met people from all walks of life who were trying to find healing or wholeness through such things as aura-balancing, drum-beating ceremonies, ancient mystical therapies, crystals, astrology, spiritual channeling, and the like. Even in a Santa Fe health food store, Garfield found some highly unusual approaches to medicine. Rather than containing the average mix of vitamins and herbs, this store offered vitamin and herb mixes called, "**Luminous Spirit, Positive Attitude, Women's Courage, Emotional Rescue, Clearing Hate, Clearing Greed, Humiliation, (and) Children of Divorce. . . .**"

If only we could find emotional rescue or spiritual growth in a pill! But it's not that easy. Where do we turn for help?

II. **WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT LIFE IS MADE OF CHOICES.** People are not born bad or good. Some people ARE born in very bad circumstances and they become scarred for life. **This is why we dare not pigeon hole another human being.** We don't know how our lives would have turned out if we had experienced what they experienced. Still, none of us will ever lose the ability to choose. When faced with a tense situation, it is easy for us to forget, that we may not be able to control the circumstances of our lives but can choose how we will respond to circumstances.

One stressful day, Eric Fellman and his sons set out late in the afternoon to do a little fishing. As he backed the boat into the water, Fellman realized that he had forgotten to unhook the boat from the trailer. The boat began to fill with water. As Fellman jumped out of the car to survey the situation, he accidentally hit the electric lock, locking his keys inside the still-running car.

Everything was a mess! Most of the live bait had escaped into the lake, the boat was almost full of water, and their lunches were effectively drowned. Eric's natural instinct was to get very angry and throw a fit. That's certainly what his sons were expecting. But suddenly, he wondered What Would Jesus Do in his place.

He remembered that Jesus had faced a similar situation when he ran into the fishermen who had just come in from a disappointing night of fishing. Although they had given up for the day, Jesus convinced them to go out again. And, of course, they caught a whole boatload of fish. With this thought inspiring his mind, Fellman figured out how to unlock his car. Then he proceeded to unhitch the boat.

Although they only had three minnows left for baiting their hooks, Eric and his sons set out to fish. Within minutes, Eric got a tug on his line. Twenty minutes later, after a fierce tug of war, he reeled in a gargantuan largemouth bass. His sons were ecstatic. And all the excitement and good memories never would have happened if Eric Fellman hadn't consciously decided to change his attitude and start all over.

We are not mere puppets forever jerked around by our emotions. We can make choices. You and I may not be able to control the circumstances of our lives but we can control how we react to those circumstances.

III. HOW WE FEEL ABOUT OURSELVES OFTEN DETERMINES THE CHOICES WE MAKE.

This is no mere twentieth-century psychobabble. If we feel that our life does not ultimately matter--if we have allowed hope to slip out of our lives--if we believe we are incapable of improving our situation--then we will make our decisions accordingly. On the other hand, **if we believe our lives ultimately do matter**, and **if we do have hope that we can improve our situations**, then that also will be reflected in the decisions we make.

Former President Jimmy Carter often reflects on the changes he sees in people's lives because of the work of Habitat for Humanity. **"We see extraordinary commitments and lives changed among forgotten people,"** he says. **"A Habitat family that lived near Washington had been living in an abandoned automobile. One of their children was an eight-year-old boy. He was very excited about getting a new house. When the family was chosen, he jumped up and down and said, 'We won, we won.' After the home was finished and the family had moved in, the little boy**

attended a different school. He had always been in a slow learner's class, but when he moved his records had been lost and he was put into a regular class by mistake. No one noticed the error, and at the end of the first half of the year, his lowest grade was a B. Now he is learning with the smartest of students. This is what having a decent home for the first time in life can do."

Now, you tell me. Was it the change of houses that made a difference or did the boy change his view of himself? How we feel about ourselves is reflected in the choices we make. If we have a positive view of ourselves, we will make positive choices. If we have a negative view of ourselves, then watch out!

IV. THERE IS ONE WHO SAYS TO US, "YOU ARE A WINNER. THERE IS HOPE FOR YOU. BY MY GRACE, YOU CAN DO IT."

In a PEANUTS strip Lucy is parked in her psychiatric booth, and Charlie Brown is sharing his problems with her. **"Sometimes I ask myself questions"**, he begins. **"Sometimes I ask myself, 'is this your real life, or is this just a pilot film? Is my life a thirty-nine-week series or is it a special?'"**

In no time at all Lucy analyzes his problem and gives him an instant answer: **"Whatever it is,"** she says, **"your ratings are way down. Five cents, please!"**

Jon Tal Murphree in his book, MADE TO BE MASTERED, writes, **"Without Lucy's special permission, I want to answer every Charlie Brown in the world. YES, this is your real life. NO, it is not a pilot film. YES, it is a special--it is very special!"** Why? Because Christ died in your behalf.

Why do good people do stupid things? Nobody knows all the answers. But we do know this:

- 1) We always have a choice.
- 2) The choices we make reflect how we feel about ourselves.
- 3) There is One who tells us that our lives are special, that the choices we make do matter, and that there is always hope.